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## A SUNSET CRUISE.

THERE is no prettier picture in this world than a smart cutter going free, when a fresh breeze sends her swishing through the waves like a veritable ocean nymph. And such is the *Pride*, bowling bravely down the upper reaches of Morecambe Bay; her sharp stem cutting through the wavelets which hiss past her smooth white sides, and stream away aft in a long wake of bubbling foam; whilst her lee scuppers are all awash as she heels over under a sky-scraping topsail. But never a white-winged yacht yet had such a crew as the witching maidens who are clustered on her weather quarter; nor was ever any tiller held by daintier hands than those of the handsome naid who is at the helm, steering deftly 'full and bye' with many a toss of her sun-glinted head as the mischievous zephyrs flutter swinging locks of waving hair about her winsome face.

The sinking sun is flushing the western horizon a deep rich pink, and throwing long slants of primrose light across the dancing water. He has left the distant Yorkshire hills to slumber in purple shadow, and his fleeting beams have slipped silently over the bowed head of Arnside Knot and are racing down its steep wooded slopes, eager to reach the golden sands below and welcome the cutter as she stands out from the curving shores of Grange across towards Holm Island, in whose rocky chasms and clefts the water laps and sighs, like the sobbing of sorrowful mermaids imprisoned in the depths below; whilst the trees which crown its steep slopes form a dense background to a so-called temple of Vesta which gleams a gray beacon upon the outermost point. Beneath, the tide runs like a mill-race, and swirls round two islet crags standing like outposts to warn the pilot of shoaling waters.

'Ready!'

'About!'

Snowy arms of exquisite rounding put the tiller hard down, the long boom swings over, soft dimpled hands haul in the jib and foresail sheets, and the *Pride* sweeps round in a magnifi-

cent curve; then, with a coquettish shake of her topsail and a coy quiver at her mainsail's throat, she springs forward on her new course.

Away on the port beam is Silverdale, whose fine new red-tiled church stands like a sentinel on guard at one end of the long straggling village, where the houses are dotted up and down in picturesque disorder, and seem on fire as the sunset glows upon the window-panes. Farther on, the distant furnaces of Carnforth flicker and shoot up their lurid flame-wreaths high into the clouds; recalling somewhat the days of old, when the beacons blazed fiercely to warn the country-side of the coming foe. Beyond, the line of the land runs low for miles, and a flashing diamond marks where the sunlight catches the glass roof of the Winter Gardens at Morecambe, the Margate of the north.

'Keep her away.'

The mainsheet squirls melodiously as it is eased a trifle, and away she slips over the tide full towards the setting sun, whose last rays wrap the sweet *damoiselles* in soft golden light, and sparkle in the bright eyes of the skipper-maiden.

Little recks the *Pride*, as she glides on, of the treacherous sands below her keel, for ten feet of water is over them, and hours will elapse before their dread banks gleam wet and drear under a chill moon. But dry they will before the night is old, for between each tide Ocean draws himself back, and leaves a vast plain of a hundred thousand sandy acres filling this noble estuary, over which the river Kent winds a shallow channel. Before the Furness Railway was built along its shores, the main road from Lancaster to the north crossed this dreary plain, a distance of from seven to eleven miles, according as the currents shifted the banks. A dismal and dangerous track enough, as the registers of neighbouring churches show—Cartmel alone recording the burial of one hundred and twenty bodies, out of whom the life had been battered by the sea as it swept over the cruel sands; for here the tide does not flow gently, darting forward for a dozen paces, and then half shyly drawing back, as if undecided

whether to advance or not; but it dashes on with a defiant heave, and rushes resistlessly and pitilessly in a curling wall of water, carrying everything before it; and woe to the loiterer overtaken, or to the craft whose moorings are not strong! A hush falls upon laughter-loving voyagers as the pilot tells how one fatal night a bridal party set out to cross from shore to shore, and were drowned in a deep sullen pool into which they floundered. Once, too, a stagecoach sank out of sight for ever in the greedy quicksands, taking down with it all the doomed passengers and struggling horses. If venturous folk will look, they may see in the wreathing storm-mists dread figures—so it is said—wandering up and down, and rushing madly to or fro—the ghosts of those who have lost their lives on the sands—and above the howling of the gale and in the moaning of the sea may hear the cries of drowned men; though unbelieving scoffers aver that they are nothing but the shrill screams of seabirds.

But whilst the 'watch below' have been spinning yarns, the fair 'helmsman' has been skilfully keeping away over to the northern shore, and now close on the starboard hand is Humphrey Head, from whose crest one of the loveliest views of mountain and of sea can be seen.

'Luff! lady, luff!'

The cutter comes up smartly into the wind, the sails flap, her way stops; the dingy which has been towing madly astern is hauled alongside, and into it the crew are piped. But somehow the *Pride* falls off, fills, and forges ahead, and the bo'sun has to let go his hold of the cutter's quarter to prevent her dragging the little boat under; and away she stands, leaving one fair 'hand' and himself adrift.

'What fun to leave them.'

But milder counsels prevail; the cruiser is gybed, and bears down upon the castaways, who little think, as they scull three pretty passengers ashore, how near they have been to pulling all the way home up the bay. Running the boat on to a shelving slab of limestone and hauling her out of the tide, the crew scramble up through the thick hazel woods and under stunted oak-trees, where the rabbits scamper and dive into the honeycombed turf, on to the long rolling ridge.

Rising up in a smooth rounded slope on its eastern side, Humphrey Head shows a bold precipitous front to the westward, buttressed by great tumbled rocks, against which the waves are breaking ninety feet below with a muffled roar like distant thunder. In the face of the cliff is a great jagged archway, leading to the Fairies' Cavern, a somewhat dolorous rendezvous for light-hearted joyous sprites; and beneath it on the shore, a so-called Holy Well, to which of old the Cumberland miners used to resort and hold high carnival as they drank its waters to cure the ill effects of lead-poisoning. But it is the grand prospect from the summit of

the Head which repays the climb. To the right lies Morecambe Bay, circled by wooded shores and rounded knolls. To the left is the estuary of the Leven, alternately a waste of melancholy sands and a great reach of heaving water, as the tide is out or in. To the north, and immediately beneath, stretches a narrow plain, shut in at the northern end by the great beech-trees of Holker, his Grace of Devonshire's favourite seat, and having in the foreground the ancient tower of Wraysholme, where once the knightly Herringtons dwelt. Then away beyond, far as the eye can reach, are the glorious mountains of the Lake-country. On the right flank is Conistone Old Man, looking bare and bold, with Wetherlam beside him; then the ragged crest of Scafell, with a suspicion of Great Gable just beyond. Nearer the middle of that wall of crags, the Langdale Pikes tower up against a band of ruby cloud; and then dauntless peaks and rugged ridges die down to the great hollow of Dunmail Raise, which bends low, to let the coach-road to Keswick pass over its neck, and then rises up to greet the 'dark brow of the mighty Helvellyn,' and make obeisance to the calm and dignified Fairfield. There they stand, those grand old giants, calmly gazing out across the world below them, utterly heedless of the clatter and racket, the hurry and bustle of that puny creature man; silently bidding him look up from the dull level of routine and custom, and climb steep paths to heights of loftier and nobler manhood.

But the sun has long since sunk into the western sea, and the uplifted heads of those everlasting hills are growing gray and grayer in the rich afterglow, which is fast changing from crimson to ruddy orange, and fading into pale primrose; and it is time to get down to the beach and aboard the cutter, which is standing off and on waiting for her boat.

A few minutes more and the *Pride* is away on a homeward course, the water coming merrily over her bows in sheets, as, with another fayre hand doing her 'trick at the helm,' she drives gallantly at the white-capped surges, rushing up their curving fronts, leaping their tumbling crests, and plunging down into the hollows with maddening glee, scattering the sparkling spray; whilst the wind laughs in the taut shrouds and running rigging.

Suddenly a vessel looms out of the gloom to windward, her black hull and dark sails giving her an uncanny look; and the absence of any sign of living being aboard, and the grim silent way she glides astern, recall that weird tradition of the Flying Dutchman. Readers of Marryat's *Phantom Ship* are of course familiar with the story of Captain Vanderdecken, who impiously swore that he would round Cape Horn in his brig if it took him until doomsday to do it, and is therefore condemned to sail for evermore with a fell crew of lost souls and to haunt the storm-lashed seas. But the crew of the *Pride* fear not their spectre-looking neighbour, for she is no supernatural brig or haunted lugger, but a staunch sloop with trawl-net down, drifting on the top of the ebb, which has begun to set.

The wind is falling with the tide and hauling

more into the north; so the sheet is paid out, and the cutter, lifting herself with an easy roll, glides on an even keel with the boom well over her quarter. The daylight has altogether died; the stars are twinkling faintly in the steel-blue sky, and a young moon is hanging her horns in the southwestern heavens and bathing the crags of Yewbarrow and its fretted plume of waving fir-trees in soft splendour. The fitful breeze, laden with the scent of juniper bushes from the land, lingers round the hushed group on the moonlight deck, loth to waft them onward out of its reach; and shyly kisses damask cheeks and toys with soft dusky hair, until it almost forgets to give bare steerage-way to the cutter, though the pilot cheerily 'whistles for the wind.' When and where did this popular superstition first take hold of the nautical mind? All the world over and for generations, sailors have believed that a breeze can be thus induced, though in many localities this musical charm is banned as likely to produce too much of a good thing. On the Yorkshire coast the fisher-folk do not like to hear any whistle aboard their boats, for they say it brings both bad winds and bad luck; though Filey men will do so when the 'wind is asleep,' to waken it. Around St Ives it is held to be unlucky to pipe up at night; and Irish fishers are careful to abstain from whistling if they happen to be in a dangerous spot, lest a gale should spring up and catch their boats there. Nor is it only uneducated minds which are affected by these beliefs, for there is a certain gallant commander of one of Her Majesty's ships, on whose breast hangs a long row of medals, who, easy-going in many things, will yet never allow his blue-jackets to whistle about the decks, for it 'never brings any good.'

Nor are the lower orders of creation without their influence on the weather, so old salts believe—curls, porpoises, and dogs, to wit; and yet they all yield the palm in this respect to the domestic cat. Why she should exert such a baleful power it is hard to imagine; yet certain it is that the crew of many a lost ship have distinctly traced their misfortunes to feline influence; and one only needs to recall one or two of the commoner phrases current in the fore-castle to see how intimately puss is associated with nautical creeds; such, for instance, as a 'cat's-paw' of wind, 'cat's-nap' (of sleep), 'cat's-lap' (weak tea), 'raining cats and dogs,' 'cats can smell the wind.' Some one has ingeniously suggested that Friday is an unlucky day because of its being dedicated to the Norse goddess Frigg, whose favourite attendants were cats.

But both hostile and friendly wind-spirits are alike out of call to-night, and the yacht seems as though she never would round Berner's Point, and the minutes slip away fast ere she gets it well abeam and opens the lights of Grange, shining out from the dark hillside in long quivering paths of brightness upon the gurgling tide. At last the shadowy pier looms out eerily from the dim wave-washed beach, and the *Pride* steals past it to her moorings just beyond. There is the plunge of an anchor, a rattle of the cable over the bows, a squeaking of blocks, a squirling of running ropes, a flapping of canvas, the sound of oars in the rowlocks, a gentle plashing of unseen waters, the grating of a boat's keel on the

sand, then a musical chorus of 'good-night,' white figures vanishing into the silver haze, and our sunset cruise has become but a golden memory of the past.

## THIS MORTAL COIL.

BY GRANT ALLEN, AUTHOR OF 'IN ALL SHADES,' ETC.

### CHAPTER XXXVII.—PROVING HIS CASE.

At the *pension* Hugh had engaged in haste a dull private sitting-room on the second floor, with bedroom and dressing-room adjoining at the side; and here he laid Winifred down on the horse-hair sofa, wearied out with her long journey and her fit of delirium. The waiter brought her up refreshments on a tray, soup and sweetbreads and country wine—the plain sound generous Ligurian claret—and she ate and drank with an apparent avidity which fairly took her husband's breath away. The food supplied her with a sudden access of hectic energy. 'Wheel me over to the window,' she cried in a stronger voice to Hugh. And Hugh wheeled the sofa over as he was bid to a point where she could see across the town and the hills and the villas and the lemon-gardens.

It was beautiful, beautiful, very beautiful. For the moment, the sight soothed Winifred. She was content now to die where she lay. Her wounded heart asked nothing further from unkind fortune. She looked up at her husband with a stony gaze. 'Hugh,' she said, in firm but grimly resolute tones, with no trace of tenderness or softening in her voice, 'bury me here. I like the place. Don't try to take me home in a box to Whitestrand.'

Her very callousness, if callousness it were, cut him to the heart. That so young and frail and delicate a girl should talk of her own death with such seeming insensibility was indeed terrible. The proud hard man was broken at last. Shame and remorse had touched his soul. He burst into tears, and kneeling by her side, tried to take her hand with some passing show of affection in his. Winifred withdrew it, coldly and silently, as his own approached it. 'Winnie,' he cried, bending over her face, 'I don't ask you to forgive me. You can't forgive me. You could never forgive me for the wrong I've done you. But I do ask you, from my soul I do ask you, in this last extremity, to believe me and to listen to me. I did not lie to you last night. It was all true, what I told you in the *coupé*. I've never intrigued against you in the way you believe. I've never deceived you for the purpose you suppose. I've treated you cruelly, heartlessly, wickedly—I acknowledge that; but oh, Winnie, I can't bear you to die as you will, believing what you do believe about me.—This is the hardest part of all my punishment. Don't leave me so! My wife, my wife, don't kill me with this coldness!'

Winifred looked over at him more stonily than ever. 'Hugh,' she said with a very slow and distinct utterance, 'every word you say to me in this hateful strain only increases and deepens my loathing and contempt for you.—You see I'm dying—you know I'm dying. You've tried to hound me and to drive me to my grave, that

you might marry Elsie.—You've tried to murder me by slow degrees, that you might marry Elsie.—Well, you've carried your point: you've succeeded at last.—You've killed me now, or as good as killed me; and when I'm dead and gone, you can marry Elsie.—I don't mind that. Marry her and be done with it.—But if ever you dare to tell me again that lying story you concocted last night so glibly in the *coupé*—Hugh Massinger, I'll tell you in earnest what I'll do: I'll jump out of that window before your very face, and dash myself to pieces on the ground in front of you.'

She spoke with feverish and lurid energy. Hugh Massinger bent his head to his knees in abject wretchedness.

'Winifred, Winifred, my poor wronged and injured Winifred,' he cried at last, in another wild outburst, 'I can do or say nothing, I know, to convince you. But one thing perhaps will make you hesitate to disbelieve me. Look here, Winifred; watch me closely!'

A happy inspiration had come to his aid. He brought over the little round table from the corner of the room and planted it full in front of the sofa where Winifred was lying. Then he set a chair close by the side, and selecting a pen from his writing-case, began to produce on a sheet of note-paper, under Winifred's very eyes, some lines of manuscript—in Elsie's handwriting. Slowly and carefully he framed each letter in poor dead Elsie's bold and large-limbed angular character. He didn't need now any copy to go by; long practice had taught him to absolute perfection each twist and curl and flourish of her pen—the very tails of her *g*'s, the black downstroke of her *f*'s, the peculiar unsteadiness of her *s*'s and her *w*'s. Winifred, sitting by in haughty disdain, pretended not even to notice his strange proceeding. But as the tell-tale letter grew on apace beneath his practised pen—Elsie all over, past human conceiving—she condescended at last, by an occasional hasty glimpse or side-glance, to manifest her interest in this singular pantomime. Hugh persevered to the end in solemn silence, and when he had finished the whole short letter, he handed it to her in a sort of subdued triumph. She took it with a gesture of supreme unconcern. 'Did any man ever take such pains before,' she cried ironically, as she glanced at it with an assumption of profound indifference, 'to make himself out to his wife a liar, a forger, and perhaps a murderer!'

Hugh bit his lip with mortification, and watched her closely. The tables were turned. How strange that he should now be all eager anxiety for her to learn the truth he had tried so long and so successfully with all his might to conceal from her keenest and most prying scrutiny!

Winifred scanned the forged letter for a minute with apparent carelessness. He had written over again from memory the single note of Elsie's—or rather of his own in Elsie's hand—that Winifred had never happened at all to show him—the second note of the series, the one he despatched on the day of her father's death. It had reached her at Invertnar Castle, redirected from Whitestrand, two mornings later. Winifred had read the few lines as soon as they arrived, and then burnt the page in haste, in the heat and flurry of that fearful time. But now, as the letter lay before her in fac-simile once more, the very

words and phrases came back to her memory, as they had come back to Hugh's, with all the abnormal vividness and distinctness of such morbid moments. Ill as she was—nay, rather dying—he had fairly aroused her feminine curiosity. 'How did you ever come to know what Elsie wrote me that day?' she asked coldly.

'Because I wrote it myself,' Hugh answered with an eager forward movement.

Winifred looked hard at him, half doubtful still. Could any man be quite so false and heartless? Admirably as he acted, could he act like this? What tragedian had ever such command of his countenance? Might not that strange story of his, so pat and straight, so consonant with the facts, so neatly adapted in every detail to the known circumstances, perhaps after all be actually true? Could Elsie be really and truly dead? Could ring and letters and circumstantial evidence have fallen out, not as she conceived, but as Hugh pretended?

'I can't make my mind up,' she muttered slowly. 'It's hard to believe that Elsie's dead. But for Elsie's sake, I hope so! I hope so!—That you have deceived me, I know and am sure. That Elsie's deceived me, I should be sorry to think, though I've often thought it. Your story, incredible as it may be, brings home all the baseness and cruelty to yourself. It exculpates Elsie. And I wish I could believe that Elsie was innocent. I could endure your wickedness if only I knew Elsie didn't share it!'

Hugh leaped from his chair with his hands clasped. 'Believe what you will about me,' he cried. 'I deserve it all. I deserve everything. But not of her—not of her, I beg of you. Believe no ill of poor dead Elsie!'

Winifred smiled a coldly satirical smile. 'So much devotion does you honour indeed,' she said in a scathing voice. 'Your consideration for dead Elsie's reputation is truly touching.—I only see one flaw in the case. If Elsie's dead, how did Mr Relf come to tell me, I should like to know, she was living at San Remo?'

'Relf!' Hugh cried, taken aback once more. 'Relf! Always! That serpent! That wriggling, insinuating, back-stairs intriguer! I hate the wretch. If I had him here now, I'd wring his neck for him with the greatest pleasure.—He's at the bottom of everything that turns up against me. He told you a lie, that's the plain explanation, and he told it to baffle me. He hates me, the cur, and he wanted to make my game harder. He knew it would sow distrust between you and me if he told you that lie; and he had no pity, like an unmanly sneak that he is, even on a poor weak helpless woman.'

'I see,' Winifred murmured with exasperating calmness. 'He told me the truth. It's his habit to tell it. And the truth happens to be very disconcerting to you, by making what you're frank enough to describe as your game a little harder. The word's sufficient. You can never do anything but play a game. That's very clear. I understand now. I prefer Mr Relf's assurance to yours, thank you!'

'Winifred,' Hugh cried, in an agony of despair, 'let me tell you the whole story again, bit by bit, act by act, scene by scene'—Winifred smiled derisively at the theatrical phrase—'and you may question me out on every part of it. Cross-



examine me, please, like a hostile lawyer, to the minutest detail.—O Winnie, I want you to know the truth now. I wish you'd believe me. I can't endure to think that you should die mistaking me.'

His imploring look and his evident earnestness shook Winifred's wavering mind again. Even the worst of men has his truthful moments. Her resolution faltered. She began, as he suggested, cross-questioning him at full. He gave his replies plainly and straightforwardly. The fever of confession had seized hold of him once more. The pent-up secret had burst its bounds. He revealed his inmost soul to Winifred—he even admitted, with shame and agony, his abiding love and remorse for Elsie.

Overcome by her feelings, Winifred leaned back on the sofa and cried. Thank heaven, thank heaven, she could cry now. He was glad of that. She could cry, after all. That poor little cramped and cabined nature, turned in upon itself so long for lack of an outlet, found vent at last. Hugh cried himself, and held her hand. In her momentary impulse of womanly softening, she allowed him to hold it. Her wan small face pleaded piteously with his heart. 'Dare I, Winnie?' he asked with a faint tremor, and leaning forward, he kissed her forehead. She did not withdraw it. He thrilled at the concession. Then he thought with a pang how cruelly he had worn her young life out. She never reproached him; her feelings went far too deep for reproach. But she cried—silently.

At length she spoke. 'When I'm gone,' she said in a fainter voice now, 'you must put up a stone by Elsie's grave. I'm glad Elsie at least was true to me!'

Hugh's heart gave a bound. Then she wavered at last! She accepted his account! She knew that Elsie was dead and buried! He had carried his point. She believed him!—she believed him!

Winifred rose, and staggered feebly to her feet. 'I shall go to bed now,' she said in husky accents. 'You may send for a doctor. I shan't last long. But on the whole, I feel better so. I wanted Elsie to be alive indeed, because I hunger and thirst for sympathy, and Elsie would give it me. But I'm glad at least Elsie didn't deceive me!' She paused for a moment and wiped her eyes; then she steadied herself by the bar of the window—the air blew in so warm and fresh. She looked out at the palms and the blue, blue sea. It seemed to calm her, the beautiful south. She gazed long and wearily at the glassy water. But her dream didn't last undisturbed for many minutes. Of a sudden, a shade came over her face. Something below seemed to sting and appal her. She started back, tottering, from the open window. 'Hugh, Hugh!' she cried, ghastly pale and quivering, 'you said she was dead!—you said she was dead! You lie to me still. O heaven, how terrible!'

'So she is,' Hugh groaned out, half catching her in his arms for fear she should fall. 'Dead and buried, on my honour, at Orfordness, Winifred!'

'Hugh, Hugh! can you *never* tell me the truth?' And she stretched out one thin white bony forefinger towards the street beyond. One second she gasped a terrible gasp; then she flung

out the words with a last wild effort: 'That's she!—that's Elsie!'

CHAPTER XXXVIII.—GHOST OR WOMAN?

Winifred spoke with such concentrated force of inner conviction that, absurd and incredible as he knew it to be—for had he not seen Elsie's own grave that day at Orfordness?—Hugh rushed over to the window in a fever of sudden suspense and anxiety, and gazed across the street to the exact spot where Winifred's ghost-like finger pointed eagerly to some person or thing on the pavement opposite. He was almost too late, however, to prove her wrong. As he neared the window, he caught but a glimpse of a graceful figure in light half-mourning—like Elsie's, to be sure, in general outline, though distinctly a trifle older and fuller—disappearing in haste round the corner by the pharmacy.

The figure gave him none the less a shock of surprise. It was certainly a very strange and awkward coincidence. He glanced at Winifred. She stood triumphant there—triumphant but heart-broken—exulting over his defeat with one dying 'I told you so,' and chuckling out inarticulately in her thin small voice, with womanish persistence: 'That's she!—that's Elsie!'

'It's very like her!' he moaned in his agony.

'Very like her!' Winifred cried with a fresh burst of unnatural strength. 'Very like her!—O Hugh, I despise you! I tell you I saw her face to face! It's Elsie—it's Elsie!'

His brain reeled and whirled with the unexpected shock; the universe turned round on him as on a pivot. 'Winifred,' he cried, 'you're right! you're right! There can't be anybody else on earth so like her! I don't know how she's come back to life! She's dead and buried at Orfordness! It's a miracle! a miracle! But that's she that we saw! I can't deny it. That's she!—that's Elsie!'

His hat lay thrown down on the table by his side. He snatched it up in his eager haste to follow and track down this mysterious resemblance. He couldn't let Elsie's double, her bodily simulacrum, walk down the street unnoticed and unquestioned. A profound horror possessed his soul. A doubter by nature, he seemed to feel the solid earth failing beneath his feet. He had never before in all his life drawn so perilously close to the very verge and margin of the unseen universe. It was Elsie herself, or else—the grave had yielded up its shadowy occupant.

He rushed to the door, on fire with his sense of mystery and astonishment. A loud laugh by his side held him back as he went. He turned round. It was Winifred, laughing, choking, exultant, hysterical. She had flung herself down on the sofa now, and was catching her breath in spasmodic bursts with unnatural merriment. That was the awful kind of laughter that bodes no good to those who laugh it—hollow, horrible, mocking, delusive. Hugh saw at a glance she was dangerously ill. Her mirth was the mirth of mania, and worse. With a burning soul and a chafing heart, he turned back, as in duty bound, to her side again. He must leave Elsie's wraith to walk by itself, unexplained and uninvestigated, its ghostly way down the streets of San Remo.

He had more than enough to do at home. Winifred was dying!—dying of laughter.

And yet her laugh seemed almost hilarious. In spite of all, it had a ghastly ring of victory and boisterous joy in it. 'O Hugh,' she cried, with little choking chuckles, in the brief intervals of her spasmodic peals, 'you're too absurd! You'll kill me! you'll kill me!—I can't help laughing; it's so ridiculous.—You tell me one minute, with solemn oaths and ingenious lies, you've seen her grave—you know she's dead and buried: you pull long faces till you almost force me to believe you—you positively cry and moan and groan over her—and then the next second, when she passes the window before my very eyes, alive and well, and in her right mind, you seize your hat, you want to rush out and find her and embrace her—here, this moment, right under my face—and leave me alone to die by myself, without one soul on earth to wait upon me or help me! Oh, you make me laugh! You've broken my heart; but you'll be the death of me.—Puck and Don Juan rolled into one!—"Elsie's dead!—Why, there's dear Elsie!"—It's too incongruous; it's too ridiculous.' And she exploded once more in a hideous semblance of laughter.

Hugh gazed at her blankly, sobered with alarm. Was she going mad? or was he mad himself?—that he should see visions, and meet dead Elsie! Could it really be Elsie? He had heard strange stories of appearances and second-sight, such as mystics among us love to dwell upon; and in all of them the appearances were closely connected with death-bed scenes. Could any truth lurk, after all, in those discredited tales of wraiths and visions? Could Elsie's ghost have come from the grave to prepare him betimes for Winifred's funeral? Or did Winifred's dying mind, by some strange alchemy, project, as it were, an image of Elsie, who filled her soul, on to his own eye and brain, as he sat there beside her?

He brushed away these metaphysical cobwebs with a dash of his hand. Fool that he was to be led away thus by a mere accidental coincidence or resemblance! He was tired with sleeplessness; emotion had unmanned him.

Winifred's laugh dissolved itself into tears. She broke down now, hysterically, utterly. She sobbed and moaned in agony on the sofa. Deep sighs and loud laughter alternated horribly in her storm of emotion. The worst had come. She was dangerously ill. Hugh feared in his heart she was on the point of dying.

'Go!' she burst out, in one spasmodic effort, thrusting him away from her side with the palm of her open hand. 'I don't want you here. Go—go—to Elsie! I can die now. I've found you all out. You're both of you alike; you've both of you deceived me.'

Hugh rang the bell wildly for the Swiss waiter. 'Send the chambermaid!' he cried in his broken Italian. 'The patroness! A lady! The signora is ill. No time to be lost. I must run at once and find the English doctor.'

When Winifred looked around her again, she found two or three strange faces crowded beside the bed on which they had laid her, and a fresh young Italian girl, the landlady's daughter, holding her head and bathing her brows with that universal specific, orange-flower water. The faint

perfume revived her a little. The landlady's daughter was a comely girl, with sympathetic eyes, and she smiled the winsome Italian smile as the poor pale child opened her lids and looked vaguely up at her. 'Don't cry, signorina,' she said soothingly. Then her glance fell, woman-like, upon the plain gold ring on Winifred's thin and wasted fourth finger, and she corrected herself half unconsciously: 'Don't cry, signora. Your husband will soon be back by your side: he's gone to fetch the English doctor.'

'I don't want him,' Winifred cried, with intense yearning, in her boarding-school French, for she knew barely enough Italian to understand her new little friend. 'I don't want my husband; I want Elsie. Keep him away from me—keep him away, I pray.—Hold my hand yourself, and send away my husband! Je ne l'aime pas, cet homme-là!' And she burst once more into a discordant peal of hysterical laughter.

'The poor signora!' the girl murmured, with wide open eyes, to the others around. 'Her husband is cruel. Ah, wicked wretch! Hear what she says! She says she doesn't want any more to see him. She wants her sister!'

As she spoke, a white face appeared suddenly at the door—a bearded man's face, silent and sympathetic. Warren Relf had heard the commotion down-stairs, from his room above, and had seen Massinger rush in hot haste for the doctor. He had come down now with eager inquiry for poor wasted Winifred, whose face and figure had impressed him much as he saw her borne out by the porters at the railway station.

'Is the signora very ill?' he asked in a low voice of the nearest woman. 'She speaks no Italian, I fear. Can I be of any use to her?'

'Ecco! 'tis Signor Relf, the English artist!' the woman cried, in surprise; for all San Remo knew Warren well as an old inhabitant.—'Come in, signor,' she continued, with Italian frankness—for bedrooms in Italy are less sacred than in England. 'You know the signora? She is ill—very ill: she is faint—she is dying.'

At the name, Winifred turned her eyes languidly to the door, and raised herself, still dressed in her travelling dress, on her elbows on the bed. She yearned for sympathy. If only she could fling herself on Elsie's shoulder! Elsie, who had wronged her, would at least pity her. 'Mr Relf,' she cried, too weak to be surprised, but glad to welcome a fellow-countryman and acquaintance among so many strangers—and with Hugh himself worse than a stranger—'I'm going to die. But I want to speak to you. You know the truth. Tell me about Elsie. Why did Elsie Challoner deceive me?'

'Deceive you!' Warren answered, drawing nearer in his horror. 'She didn't deceive you. She couldn't deceive you. She only wished to spare your heart from suffering all her own heart had suffered. Elsie could never deceive any one!'

'But why did she write to say she was in Australia, when she was really living here in San Remo?' Winifred asked piteously. 'And why did she keep up a correspondence with my husband?'

'Write she was in Australia! She never wrote,' Warren cried in haste, seizing the poor dying girl's thin hand in his.—'Mrs Massinger,

this is no time to conceal anything. I dare not speak to you against your husband, but still'—

'I hate him!' Winifred gasped out, with concentrated loathing. 'He has done nothing since I knew him but lie to me and deceive me. Don't mind speaking ill of him; I don't object to that. What kills me is that Elsie has helped him! Elsie has helped him!'

'Elsie has not,' Warren answered, lifting up her white little hand to his lips and kissing it respectfully. 'Elsie and I are very close friends. Elsie has always loved you dearly. If she's hidden anything from you, she hid it for your own sake alone.—It was Hugh Massinger who forged those letters.—I can't let you die thinking ill of Elsie. Elsie has never, never written to him.—I know it all.—I'll tell you the truth. Your husband thought she was drowned at Whitstrand!'

'Then Hugh doesn't know she's living here?' Winifred cried eagerly.

Warren Relf hardly knew how to answer her in this unexpected crisis. It was a terrible moment. He couldn't expose Elsie to the chance of meeting Hugh face to face. The shock and strain, he knew, would be hard for her to bear. But, on the other hand, he couldn't let that poor broken-hearted little woman die with this fearful load of misery unlightened on her bosom. The truth was best. The truth is always safest. 'Hugh doesn't know she's living here,' he answered slowly. 'But if I could only be sure that Hugh and she would not meet, I'd bring her round, before she leaves San Remo, this very day, and let you hear from her own lips, beyond dispute, her true story.'

Winifred clenched her thin hands hard and tight. 'He shall never enter this room again,' she whispered hoarsely, 'till he enters it to see me laid out for burial.'

### COURTS-MARTIAL.

THE public mind was some months ago seriously disquieted by a court-martial held at Brompton Barracks, Chatham, on Major Templer, of the King's Own Royal Rifles. That officer was charged with the serious offence of betraying certain State secrets with regard to ballooning and balloon-making, and with telling lies to his superior officers. The Major was not only fully and honourably acquitted, but has returned to his duty; he has also received the approval of all sections of the press, and the practical sympathy of the Government, who have paid all the expenses—about six hundred pounds—which he necessarily incurred in his defence. The Secretary of State for War has not only personally apologised to the gallant officer, but also from his place in the House of Commons. So large a section of the public have taken a deep interest in the above case, that probably many readers will be glad to learn something of the constitution and powers of courts-martial.

For the benefit of the uninitiated, it may be mentioned that neither officers nor soldiers lose their rights as civilians by being in the army; but they are bound also by the sterner codes of the Mutiny Act, Articles of War, and Army Judicature Act. The decisions or findings on all the cases to which we presently refer having been

officially promulgated, none are of a debatable nature.

Courts-martial have probably derived their name and much of their jurisdiction from the Marshal's Court or court-martial of our ancient organisation. Their modern form—ensuring the benefits of trial by jury—was established in the reign of Charles I. A strong resemblance to the 'Articles and Military Laws' of Gustavus Adolphus and the military jurisprudence of Germany and the Low Countries, is apparent in our courts-martial system of the present day. The ordinary jurisdiction of courts-martial extends to taking cognisance of offences committed either at home or abroad, by land or sea, by those who are subject to the Army or Mutiny Act. The courts not only have the powers of a court of general assize, but are essentially courts of equity and honour; and no appeal lies from the sentence of a court-martial either to the Court of Queen's Bench or to any other court in the British dominions. This apparently remarkable anomaly is accounted for by the fact that the Judge Advocate-General personally submits to the sovereign, for approval, the proceedings of general courts-martial, and therefore it would be unconstitutional for a court of law to revise or review the personal approval of the queen or king.

Courts-martial are of five denominations: (1) General, (2) Detachment General, (3) District (or Garrison), (4) Detachment (or Regimental), and (5) Drum Head; and the number of commissioned officers required to form them varies from three to eleven, according to their denomination, and according to the part of the world in which they may be assembled. Their internal working is remarkable, and instructive, when compared with that of ordinary courts of law, and may be illustrated by reference to cases which have taken place since 1862, when much regimental dirty linen was washed before the public. In that year, the non-military world had its newspapers filled with a scandal to which a distinguished regiment, then in Dublin, treated the public. A Captain of that regiment was tried upon the following charges: 'For not having submitted the matter of Colonel —'s insult to be dealt with by superior authority, in compliance with the 17th Article of War; for not having taken proper lawful steps to vindicate his character; and also for having, in his final letter, stated that he had submitted his application to retire from the army "entirely through intimidation," knowing the statement to be false.'

The court-martial was held in barracks in Dublin, in a room once a schoolroom, which still retained its wall ornaments of maps and diagrams. Near the entrance door was a general miscellaneous collection of Irish jaunting-cars and seedy cabs, plenty of idlers, a few officers, and many orderlies and other soldiers on duty. Inside the room, the officers comprising the court, arrayed in scarlet (or blue), edged with gold, *not* ermine, sat at a long table covered with green baize. When a witness was called, there being no witness-box, he usually took up his own position. The Captain—whose trial, by the way, took twenty-nine days—had comfortably ensconced himself in a corner behind a neat table, and added materially to his own comfort, and, as events proved, 'confounded the knavish tricks' of his enemies



by 'taking to himself' two or three gentlemen in neat black dress, who sat near him. These were his solicitors and counsel; but, according to military rule of 1862, the judges in scarlet had to be 'colour-blind' regarding these personages, who were assumed to convey their professional assistance in a surreptitious and mysterious manner. After the court had been sworn 'to duly administer justice according to the rules and articles for the better government of Her Majesty's forces, and according to an Act then in force for the punishment of Mutiny and Desertion and other crimes therein specified, without partiality, favour, or affection,' &c., the witnesses were duly called, and then the court became a 'spectacle,' in its happy mimicry of a genuine trial, by the strangeness of the procedure, the length and sluggishness of this *cause célèbre*. The court-martial system with its measured pace and grave tediousness, however, put to shame the indecent haste in which, inside the genuine temples of law, cases are sometimes unduly rushed or scamped through, regardless of their merits; but the scarlet judge and jury who sat at the table in happy equality, no doubt felt themselves to be trustees of the court-martial system, and having apparently no fixed idea as to what evidence was to be excluded or admitted, administered justice with all proper scrupulousness and deliberation. When the prisoner, the Captain, wished to put a question, either he or one of his legal advisers wrote it on a slip of paper, handed it to an orderly, who took it to the President (or supreme judge of the court), who first read it to himself. If he thought there was anything wrong in the question, he probably had a friendly colloquy with the prisoner and suggested an alteration; but if the Captain was obstinate, the 'docket' went on to the Judge Advocate-General, and after antagonistic trimming or shaping, the question was either put, or the court cleared that the judges might sit with closed doors to deliberate on it. In the latter event, the professional amateur brethren who had crowded in from the four courts of Dublin, the prisoner and his advisers, newspaper reporters, and all the tag-rag and bobtail, were hastily hunted out, and the door of the court shut while the members held counsel. In about a quarter of an hour the door was opened, and in scamped, with much rushing and stamping, the excluded heterogeneous human mass. Order and silence having been restored, the military chief-justice reads in a sonorous impressive voice the decision of the court on the question. The decision was that it might be put, and it ran as follows:

*Question.* Did Colonel Touchempsup state to you, in the presence of Cornet Snaffle, that the prisoner rode improperly, and needed a back-board?

Heavy Dragoon Captain, witness, deliberately replied: 'I do not remember positively.'

After the answer had been written down, the (acting) Judge Advocate-General read it out in measured terms. The slip of paper on which the question had been written was now impaled on a 'bill-file,' and the transaction ended, only to be recommenced in similar fashion.

*Question by the Prisoner.* Do you consider the Colonel persecuted me?

After this question had travelled safely through the stages we have enumerated, the Heavy

Dragoon Captain replied: 'I respectfully object to answer.'

A member of the court who was making a surreptitious and caricature sketch, stopped short with astonishment, and the court, through its President, gently pressed Heavy Dragoon Captain to reply. The Heavy Dragoon Captain positively refused, and as before, the court was, to the disgust of its occupiers, again cleared. After an interval of twenty minutes, the debate with closed doors is over, and the public are readmitted.

*Result.*—The court decide that the Heavy Dragoon Captain *must* answer.

The Deputy Judge Advocate-General reads the question aloud. The Heavy Dragoon Captain, after looking at the ceiling, the map on the wall, the prisoner, and the court, replies in measured voice: 'I do not know.'

The pens once more took up the burden, and so this punctilious method went on. This is no over-drawn sketch; it had been the system of court-martial procedure for over a hundred years; indeed, it is only within the last four or five years that the system has been altered, and assimilated to the practice of ordinary law-courts. A witty writer of 1862 thus analyses the manner in which the different days of this court-martial were occupied, and there is really no over-colouring:

	Days.
Case for the prosecution.....	7
Defence and evidence for the prisoner.....	7½
Inquiry whether or not Colonel — tampered with a witness.....	1½
Witness to contradict the defence.....	5
Witness to contradict the witnesses who contradicted the defence.....	2
Witness to contradict the witnesses who contradicted the witnesses who contradicted the defence.....	2
Witness to contradict the last-mentioned witness.....	1
Concluding speech of Captain —, who had spoken twice before.....	1
Concluding speech of the prosecutor.....	1
Fragments of days.....	1

29

Of course, if the trial had been before a judge, the greater part of the evidence and the contradictions of the witnesses, like the House that Jack built, would have been rejected as irrelevant to the question at issue; in point of fact, this regimental squabble really occupied as much time as all the four trials of Palmer, Madeleine Smith, Smeethurst, and Rush. In these trials of intense intricacy and importance, where the parties were tried for their lives, the judges satisfactorily got over all the cases within the period this one court-martial occupied. The end of the above long trial was that the Captain in question was acquitted of the first and third charges, found guilty of the second, and sentenced to be turned out of the service. He had, however, as previously explained, artfully provided himself with those skilful weapons, a good solicitor and advocate; and as a final result, the court-martial was not confirmed, on the ground of some legal irregularity, and the officer thus became an acquitted man.

A few years after, the public were treated to two more decidedly scandalous courts-martial, and accusations enough were freely exchanged to render the small and select society to which the



accused belonged the reverse of comfortable. One of the officers involved, a Captain, was A.D.C. to the Commander-in-chief in India, and had the reputation of being a zealous and good officer; but differences between him and his chief arose somehow, and the result was a court-martial which was a public scandal all over India and England, both from the time it occupied and the nature of the evidence. The War Office authorities took up the case, and a correspondence took place between them and the Indian authorities, in which both parties indulged in the pastime of pelting each other with adjectives.

With regard to the other officer, a Colonel, the accusations were so framed, and the feeling in India so strong against him, that the venue was changed from India to England, so that the Colonel and his accusers and a multitude of witnesses were brought at the public expense from India to England, where the trial took place. At that court-martial, more regard was had as to conditions of space for the public and the reporters, and the newspapers had, as the Americans say, 'a high good time' in reporting the case for many days. The public also were gratified by all sorts of imputations of conspiracy and malice, with so much hunting after regimental squabbles, foreign to the issue, that the original charge against the Colonel seemed to fade into insignificance. The court-martial lasted a good many weeks, and the Colonel was acquitted. The battle, however, was an expensive one, and the public had to pay about fifty thousand pounds for the pastime. Since that court-martial, however, the War Office have not indulged in a similar financial exploit of bringing accused, accuser, and all the witnesses from a distant land to England for the purpose of holding the trial.

In 1876, when there had been, as it were, a Rip-van-Winkle interval of eight or ten years, the War Office woke up from its slumbers, and indulged the public with a court-martial on one of the officers of a marching regiment. That gentleman was tried at Belfast on charges which it is unnecessary to specify. It was considered to be a remarkable fact at the time, that many people who gave evidence before the court and flatly contradicted each other were supposed to be models of honour and veracity. This trial only lasted twelve days, but an enormous amount of mud was thrown, and the 'scarlet inquisition' had no easy task in hunting down the right parties. The same system as to writing down questions on slips of paper was pursued; the defence was printed and read aloud in court, which was anything but a 'harbour of repose,' from the number of objections made to the line adopted by the prosecution, and also other points raised by the solicitor for the prisoner. Finally, the officer was acquitted of the whole of the first charge; but he was convicted of a portion of the second charge; and a few days after, the *Irish Times* astonished the public by publishing the sentence of the court, and hinting at the votes of the members, apparently by a very narrow majority, adverse to the prisoner.

As an oath is taken by all the members neither to divulge the sentence until the court-martial has been confirmed, nor 'on any account at any time whatsoever to disclose or discover' the vote or opinion of any particular member of the court,

this incident excited much comment and inquiry; but the press as usual kept its own counsel, and nothing was proved against any one. The officer had to leave the army; but Her Majesty was graciously pleased to order the price of his commission to be paid him.

In the Templer court-martial recently held at Chatham, the prosecutor and the prisoner were permitted to be represented in the ordinary way by counsels and solicitors. The Major took full advantage of his powers, and provided himself with an astute solicitor, and a very clever cross-examining counsel, Mr Winch, Q.C. The latter gentleman considerably edified the court, the witnesses, and the public, by the free use of his sharp scalping-knife of cross-examination, which he applied somewhat ruthlessly all round to the hostile witnesses, springing a mine from time to time on the Treasury Advocate who prosecuted. It is a step in the right direction that the advocate of a prisoner may, like the French advocate who addresses a *conseil de guerre* when a French prisoner is tried, address a court-martial.

In accordance with rule, the court was closed after the defence had ended, and the President asked each officer to vote 'guilty or not guilty' according to his conscience and his oath, beginning with the junior member of the court. As the Major was acquitted, he was at once released. Had he been found guilty, the proceedings of the court-martial, after being examined in the office of the Judge Advocate-General, would have been laid before the Queen for final approval or disapproval. As a proof of the value of the 'new system,' we may mention that this court-martial occupied only four days. Probably, had it come before a judge, he would have stopped the case in a few hours.

## MRS FARQUHARSON'S NIECE.

BY WILLIAM GALBRAITH.

IN FOUR CHAPTERS.

### CHAP. I.—AN UNEXPECTED ARRIVAL.

WHEN I first left home to act as companion to Mrs Farquharson at Shuttleton Manor, I was only eighteen, and very simple and inexperienced; but, unlike many who long to try their wings outside the home circle, my first flight into the great world beyond tended nothing to diminish the bright visions in which young hearts are prone to indulge, for, in Mrs Farquharson's house, I was from the beginning treated more like a daughter than a hired companion; and though I missed the home faces very much, yet I was seldom subject to those fits of loneliness and depression which are the general experience of those launched out on the busy world for the first time and separated from all family ties.

Mrs Farquharson was a widow, with no children; two she had had, but both died in infancy out in India, where her husband had held a post under government. She had been but two years in England when I first went to her, having come home after her husband's death. Possessed of ample means—for she had a private fortune of her own, inherited from an aunt, besides what her

husband left—she yet lived in a very quiet style, keeping but four servants and seeing little company; indeed, but for an occasional visit from the rector or his wife, and a chance one from the curate, we would have seen almost nobody save ourselves. The house was large, commodious, and old-fashioned, and had been known as the Manor for ages back. It had been for some time untenanted before Mrs Farquharson entered into possession, the owner being unmarried and resident abroad. It was a larger house than Mrs Farquharson at first contemplated renting; but the rent was very moderate, and she conceived a liking for it when first she saw it, which finally led to her leasing it for a period of five years. A good many of the rooms were unfurnished, because not required. I may add here that, beyond its antiquity, there was nothing romantic about the house—no thrilling, blood-curdling stories of restless ghosts roaming the gloomy corridors aimlessly through the silent watches of the night, or of haunted chambers and dark deeds committed in days gone by, but, on the contrary, everything was very prosaic and matter of fact, as befitted the nineteenth century. The Manor stood about a quarter of a mile off the main road which led to the village of Shuttleton, and was approached by a long avenue of beeches. The grounds around it were pretty extensive, though much less so than in days long since past.

My duties as companion were very light. Sometimes I read to Mrs Farquharson while she sewed; wrote letters to her dictation, or occupied myself with some fancy-work while we both sat and chatted. At other times we drove out occasionally, hiring from the village inn for this purpose—Mrs Farquharson keeping neither horse nor carriage—or strolled about the grounds together, she being still strong and active for her years. My lines had certainly fallen in pleasant places; and although many of my age would have considered the life we led somewhat dull, yet I never found it so, as at home I had been used to a very quiet humdrum life and had small inclination for gaiety of any kind. I had always been of a quiet disposition—too much so for my years, my dear mother often said. We had recently had a new member added to our household at the Manor in the shape of an old bachelor brother of Mrs Farquharson's—Mr Vaughan, a Professor of Theology from one of the universities, who, through failing health, had felt himself obliged to resign his professorship, and, at his sister's request, had been prevailed on to give up his own bachelor establishment and come and live with her. His presence made little difference in our mode of living, however, as he buried himself in his books from morning till night, and spent most of his time in his own room, generally having his meals sent up to him, so that sometimes for days together I scarcely saw him. He was engaged writing a work on theology, which took up a great portion of his time. He never joined us in our walks or drives, and seldom left the house except when he went up to town for a day to purchase some new book or visit some old acquaintance.

One bright sunny afternoon in June, about six months after my arrival at the Manor, I started for the village, a book under my arm, borrowed from the village library, which Mrs Farquharson and I had been reading together, and which I

intended to return. Here in the darkened avenue the sun's strong heat did not penetrate, and my white sunshade hung carelessly in my hand as I walked along. When I came within view of the east gate, I caught sight of a figure approaching, evidently making for the house. It was that of a woman, dressed entirely from head to foot in gray, and carrying a cloak of the same Quaker-like hue over her arm. In her hand she carried a small travelling bag. She was advancing along the avenue at a swinging pace, and flourishing the bag backwards and forwards in her hand, as though its weight were nothing. On first observing me, she seemed somewhat taken aback; her swinging pace dwindled down into a graceful walk, and her hand with the bag dropped to her side very demurely, and remained stationary. As she came nearer, I saw that she was of fair complexion, had on a short veil, and wore her hair cut short behind and in a fringe over her brow. She was remarkably tall, I thought, for a woman, but carried her figure gracefully. When she stopped beside me, I felt like a pigmy beside a giantess.

'I beg your pardon,' said she, in a soft deep musical voice, 'but am I right in thinking this avenue leads to the Manor—to Mrs Farquharson's?'

'You are perfectly right,' I answered. 'This leads you direct to the Hall entrance. You cannot go wrong.'

She thanked me, and walked on, not without an admiring glance at my soft white dress and light straw hat. For my life I could not help turning to look after her. Perhaps she suspected this, for she never turned her head or resumed her swinging walk, although I watched her till she went out of sight round a turn of the avenue. 'Who can she be?' I wondered. 'Certainly, not a visitor to the servants; and yet Mrs Farquharson was expecting no one, and this girl seems as though she had come to stay.'

When I got back to the house it was nearly six o'clock. The door was opened by Mrs Glass the housekeeper, with whom I was a great favourite. I saw instantly by her face that she had something to tell me. She followed me up-stairs to my room. 'Mrs Farquharson has a visitor this afternoon, miss,' she began, shutting the door behind her carefully, 'a niece of hers—a Miss Selwyn. She has come to stay for a day or two. We are having tea at half-past six.'

'Is she a tall young lady dressed in gray?' I inquired, much interested. 'For if so, I met her in the avenue, coming here.'

'Yes, miss, that is her,' replied Mrs Glass, 'tall and fair.—I don't think Mrs Farquharson expected her, for she appeared much surprised when she arrived.'

'I suppose I had better not go down till Mrs Farquharson sends for me, then,' I said. 'She will have a lot of things to say to her niece, probably, that she may not wish a stranger to hear. I wonder she did not mention her coming to me, if she knew.'

'I don't think she did, miss; but I will have to go down and see after things. I don't want Mrs Farquharson to catch me gossiping.'

After she left me, I stood gazing abstractedly out of the window into the garden beyond, my thoughts full of the unexpected visitor. I hoped

if she were going to stay for any length of time, she would prove nice and agreeable; for, if not, I might be made very uncomfortable in my position of companion. Mrs Farquharson had a sister down in one of the southern counties, I knew, whose married name was Selwyn; but of the existence of a Miss Selwyn I had never previously heard. My impression, indeed, had been that she had none of a family; but evidently I was mistaken. There had also been another sister married, who had died many years ago, leaving a son, who was in business somewhere in London. I had never seen Mrs Selwyn at the Manor.

I washed my face and hands, changed my dress for one of black grenadine—a present from Mrs Farquharson—placed a few flowers in my hair and dress, and then my toilet was complete. Mrs Farquharson and I always dined together, as a matter of course; but to-night I hesitated about going down till sent for. I felt my position slightly altered by the arrival of Miss Selwyn. About half-past six, however, a message was brought me by one of the maids that Mrs Farquharson wished me to go down-stairs to join her and Miss Selwyn at tea. Somewhat fluttered, I descended the broad stairway leading to the hall. I found Mrs Farquharson and her niece in her favourite sitting-room, at the back of the large drawing-room, where we generally dined when alone. Our dinner-hour was three o'clock, and tea at six. We kept somewhat primitive hours.

As I entered the room, Miss Selwyn was standing admiring herself in a large mirror which stood over the mantel-piece. She still wore her gray dress, and looked even taller without her hat. She came forward with a smile.

'Doris, my friend Miss Stuart.—Naomi, this is my niece, Doris Selwyn. I daresay you have heard me speak of her.' Mrs Farquharson seemed to perform this introduction with an effort. As a matter of fact, I had never previously heard Miss Selwyn mentioned; but I let that pass.

'Miss Stuart and I have already met, aunt,' Miss Selwyn said frankly, holding out her hand and dropping a light kiss on my cheek. As she did so, I happened to glance towards Mrs Farquharson, and was astonished at the expression of something almost like fear which her countenance betrayed; but it was but momentary; an instant later, I concluded I was mistaken.

'I hope we shall be great friends,' continued Miss Selwyn. 'I always know at first whether I shall like a person or not, and I think I shall like you.—And so your name is Naomi! It is very quaint and pretty, I think, and just suits you.'

'Not so pretty as your own,' said I. 'Mine is rather old-maidish and sedate; while yours'—

'Puts you in mind of a giddy romp, as I am,' interrupted she in a gay tone.—'Are you not surprised at seeing me, Miss Stuart? The fact is, I was returning home from a visit to some friends in Scotland, and passing by this place, thought I would look aunt and uncle up on the way.—Uncle has not yet put in an appearance, though.—You will have to excuse my dress, for all the rest of my luggage has been sent on, and I have only this with me, and one for the mornings; but I knew aunt lived very quietly, so I daresay it will not matter.'

'I am sure, Doris, both Naomi and I are very

pleased to see you,' said Mrs Farquharson, rather more cordially, I thought; 'only, perhaps you will find it dull.—As for the dress, if necessary that can easily be remedied; but probably you will not need, as you are sure to tire of our quiet life.—But here comes tea at last.'

During the meal, which Professor Vaughan did not honour with his presence, Miss Selwyn talked incessantly, rattling on at such a rate and using so many slang terms that I was rather amazed, but nevertheless enjoyed her conversation very much. Mrs Farquharson, too, appeared to unbend towards her niece. At first, by her manner, I had judged the visitor to be unwelcome, but attributed this to Mrs Farquharson's dislike to anything which disturbed our retired way of living. I must say that Miss Selwyn was blest with an extraordinarily good appetite, for I did think she never would have finished; while Mrs Farquharson and I merely dawdled over our meal to keep her in countenance.

'I was dreadfully famishing, aunt,' she said at length, pushing back her cup. 'I should so like to have a stroll about the grounds'—rising and walking towards the long window which opened outwards into the garden.—'If you do not care for coming, perhaps Miss Stuart will accompany me, or I can go alone.'

A little to my surprise, for she never went out after sunset, Mrs Farquharson rose at once, wrapping round her a white shawl, which hung over the back of her chair.—Miss Selwyn had snatched up an antimacassar from the couch, and gracefully flung it over her shoulders.—'I will go with you, Doris,' Mrs Farquharson said; 'Naomi will be tired after her walk.'

I was about to disclaim all feeling of weariness; but without waiting, Miss Selwyn swung open the window, and a minute later they were outside amongst the flowers. Seen from the window, there was a strong resemblance between them; both were tall, though Miss Selwyn had decidedly the advantage, and their features were very similar. Miss Selwyn's were if anything too large for a woman; and her closely cropped hair gave her a boyish appearance, which well suited the hoydenish character she affected. She might be somewhere about three or four and twenty, judging by her looks. She interested me greatly; her frank careless manner was very winning; she was such a complete contrast to myself in every way, for I was small and dark, and had little to say to any one until I was well acquainted. The habit she had of interlarding her conversation with slang terms gave a piquancy to it that seemed to render her smallest remarks brilliant and witty. She was undeniably handsome; while I had never considered myself a beauty at the best of times. I longed to join them, and for the first time felt as if Mrs Farquharson might consider me an intruder, since she had not asked me to accompany them.

Next morning I rose early as usual, for I liked a half-hour amongst the flowers before breakfast. I was busy arranging a small bouquet from my own particular plot for the breakfast table, when I heard footsteps approaching, and looking up, beheld Miss Selwyn, arrayed in a crimson morning gown, with Mrs Farquharson's white shawl round her shoulders, and on her head an old



garden hat of my own, which she had picked up in the hall.

'Good-morning,' she cried gaily. 'I saw you from the window, and thought it a pity to let you pine in solitude and alone. So here I am.'

'I wasn't pining; but I am glad to see you all the same.—Isn't it a lovely morning? I hope you slept well, Miss Selwyn?'

'Thanks. I slept better than I expected.—By the way, where did you disappear to last night? When aunt and I came in, you had gone off.—I hope you will not let my being here make any difference to you, Miss Stuart. I should like to call you Naomi, and you can call me Doris. May I?'

'Certainly, if you wish,' I stammered, colouring a little. 'You are very kind.—I had some letters to write last night, and took the opportunity of doing so when Mrs Farquharson would not be likely to miss me.'

'Oh, that is all right, then. I was afraid I had driven you away.—Uncle came down-stairs after aunt and I came in last night, and I had "quite a time" with him, as the Americans say.—What a comical old boy he is; he seems half asleep most of the time. I must try and rouse him up; see if I don't! I told him he must come down to breakfast this morning, as I wouldn't enjoy the meal without him; and if he doesn't turn up, I'll let him hear of it. He'll have to give up his beloved books for one morning at least.—Is this your own particular garden, Naomi? Aunt tells me you take chief charge of the flowers.'

'Yes; this is my own little plot,' I replied, twisting a long blade of grass round the stalks of my bouquet and then holding the flowers up to her for inspection. 'Did you ever see anything so pretty?'

'I think I have,' she answered smiling, glancing at me meaningly as she spoke. 'A great deal prettier, too. But they are very nice.—I should like that rose you have, it is so sweet.—Thank you, I shall keep it for your sake.—There is aunt looking from the window; perhaps we had better go in.' And in we went, my face flushing rosy red at the compliment her eyes had paid me. Had she been a man, I do not think I could have been more confused.

#### SMUGGLING IN THE HIGHLANDS.

SINCE the repeal of the Malt Tax in 1880, an increase of smuggling has gradually taken place in the Highlands, and this increase is beginning to assume formidable proportions, in spite of the utmost endeavours of the revenue authorities. About the middle of the present century smuggling was very common in the wild isolated parts of the country; but owing to the restrictions placed on the materials used in the manufacture of spirits, and the vigilance and zeal of the revenue officers, illicit distillation was practically suppressed; and although a few working bothies or huts still existed, the quantity of spirits made in them did not seriously affect the interests of the revenue.

The stations formed by the Board of Inland Revenue for the suppression of smuggling are of

two kinds, called Preventive Stations and Preventive Rides respectively. The former are established in parts where smuggling is known to be extensively practised, the staff consisting of an Inland Revenue officer and one or two 'Preventive men.' These have also the occasional assistance of a supervisor, who has generally four or five stations under his charge, each station being visited by him, on an average, once a week. The officer and his men always search in company; and as they are required to sleep away from home eight times per fortnight, a special allowance is made to them, to meet the expenses incurred for lodgings and subsistence. Preventive Rides are made in places where illicit distillation is not carried on, but where, owing to the smuggling inclinations of the people, and where the geographical formation of the country favours the unlawful making of spirits being carried on with some chances of secrecy, smuggling would be certain to commence if an official was not at hand to check it. One officer is considered sufficient for this; and in addition to the usual work of securing the license duties in his station, he has to endeavour to find out, by means of inquiries or searching, if any illicit practices are carried on in his neighbourhood.

It will thus be seen that the Preventive Station with its comparatively large staff is much more expensive than the Ride, and as smuggling was gradually suppressed, many of the stations were abolished for the sake of economy, and Rides established in their places.

Owing to the Malt Duty regulations, and the considerable time it takes to change barley into malt, and the consequent risk of being detected in its illicit manufacture, the decreased staff was able to prevent the revival of smuggling; but as soon as the Malt Duty was repealed, the smugglers seized the opportunity of recommencing operations, as they were quite aware of the reduced strength of the revenue establishments, it being impossible for a single officer to enter a bothy, seize the offenders, and destroy the utensils. It is only recently that the authorities recognised the gravity of the crisis that had arisen, and steps are being taken to re-establish some of the Preventive Stations, and deal with the smuggling in a determined manner.

The smuggler generally figures in novels and in the imagination as a highly interesting and romantic creature; but on a personal acquaintance, these ideas respecting him soon give place to others of an entirely different character. Instead of the generous and high-spirited individual one expects to meet, the smuggler is seen to be a very low type of a Highlander, much addicted to drinking, laziness, and lying, and bearing a great similarity in character to the poacher of the South. He generally pretends to follow some employment, such as a diker, fencer, stone-breaker, &c.; but it is on very rare occasions that he can be found engaged in his professed trade. He is generally to be seen lounging about



the village in a listless manner, as if he were one of the most innocent beings and quite incapable of breaking any law. At intervals he disappears from his haunts for five or six days; and when he returns, there is an unmistakable odour of 'peat-reek' (peat-smoke) about him; and the redness of his eyes at once gives evidence that he was a great deal among smoke during his absence. A few days' dissipation will follow, then a period of lounging, and he will again disappear for another short time.

As it is well known that whisky cannot be made without a plentiful supply of cold water, the smuggler usually selects for his operations a secluded spot in the side of a well-wooded burn with high banks. A square part is dug out till the bottom is nearly level with the water. The front is now built up with rough stones, a space being left for entry and exit. The bank forms the other three sides of the bothy, and the roof is made with crossed sticks covered with tarpaulin, the whole being concealed with brushwood and heather so cunningly adjusted and sloped that it requires the minutest scrutiny to ascertain that nature has not been disturbed. This building is necessary to protect the workers from the inclemency of the weather, and to conceal the light of the distilling fire from the watchful eyes of the revenue officials. The manufacture of whisky requires two distinct operations—namely, brewing and distilling. Brewing consists in placing ground malt in a vessel, pouring boiling water over it, and stirring the mixture till the strength of the malt is transferred to the water, which then receives the name of 'wort.' The wort is now removed from the grains and placed in another vessel, and to this yeast is added. Fermentation then takes place, which gradually reduces the specific gravity; and when it has attenuated, or reduced in gravity, to a certain point, it is ready for distilling. This process consists in separating the alcohol from the other ingredients of which the wort is composed; and for this purpose the liquor is placed in a vessel called a 'still,' which is of peculiar construction. It is made of copper, as a cheaper material will impart its taste to the spirits, is generally of a round shape, and of considerable capacity at the lower part, but gradually growing narrower towards the upper end, which has a closely fitting cover or head with a hole, into which a small pipe fits accurately, this pipe soon taking a downward course. Fire is now applied to the bottom of the still; and when the liquor is sufficiently heated, the alcohol having the property of assuming the form of vapour at a lower temperature than any of the other ingredients, escapes into the pipe at the top in the form of steam. This pipe is of considerable length, but of zigzag form, and is called the 'worm.' As it is necessary to condense the steam quickly, this is done by laying the worm in cold water, which accounts for its crooked shape, as it would be very inconvenient to cover a long straight pipe with a continuous stream of cold water. The condensed steam runs into a vessel from the end of the worm in the form of whisky; and when all the spirits are run off, the operation is finished. The time taken by the brewing and distilling processes is generally from five to six days. The 'peat-reek' odour of the smuggler and the redness of his eyes, which

were previously mentioned as being peculiar to him on his return home after the completion of his illegal work, are caused by working in the close smoke-laden atmosphere of the bothy. As the smoke is apt to draw attention to their labour, the peats are generally charred in their houses before being used in the bothy, as peats thus treated do not give off so much smoke during consumption as fresh ones.

The most valuable part of a smuggler's plant is the still and worm; and great precautions are used to prevent these from falling into the hands of the excise staff. A special hiding-place is prepared at a considerable distance from the bothy, this place generally being a deep pool of water or an artfully excavated hole. As they are only taken to the bothy when required for distillation, and removed to their hiding-place when the operation is finished, the only vessels that are destroyed or seized by the officials when a bothy is discovered—except the seizure be made during the distilling process—are the mashing and fermenting vessels, which, being made of wood, are of little value, and are easily replaced. Another point on which the ingenuity of the smuggler is exercised is to dispose of the 'draff,' or mashed malt, without being discovered. In places very difficult of access, it is sometimes allowed to remain near the scene of operations; but as there is always a danger of the accumulations being seen by prying eyes, it is safer when it can be completely destroyed. It is dangerous to put it into the burn, as some particles would be certain to lodge at the sides and thus betray the presence of smuggling; and the plan adopted, if at all possible, is to bring cattle to the vicinity and give them the grains to eat, thus destroying all traces through the presence of draff by which their secret place may be discovered.

The only way that smugglers can be captured in the midst of their labours is to make a raid on them by night, as watchers are placed during the day on commanding positions, and the alarm is at once given when enemies are seen in the neighbourhood. The position of a bothy must be pretty accurately known to the officers before they attempt to look for it at night, as it would be a hopeless task to commence a vague search among the hills and glens during the darkness; and they generally learn the whereabouts of the smuggling ground from informers, who give the information for the sake of a reward or from motives of revenge. The following instances of the capture of smuggling material came under the personal observation of the writer during an extended stay in the Highlands.

One day the officer of a Preventive Ride received notice that distilling was being carried on in a certain burn, and that the operation would be completed during the coming night. The burn was not in his own station, so he telegraphed to the proper officer and to his own supervisor to meet him that evening at a certain place. The supervisor duly appeared; but the other did not come, as he did not receive the telegram in time, being absent from home. As the district was not known to the two, and the informer was afraid to accompany them in case he should be recognised, they had not much hope of being able to find the place; but they resolved to do their best, as prompt action had to

be taken, or the opportunity would be lost. The night was very wet and cold; and after a drive of sixteen miles, they arrived at an hotel about four miles from the burn, where the horse was put up, and the officers set out to complete the rest of the journey on foot. They arrived at the lower end of the burn about one A.M., and immediately commenced their search. Their progress up the stream was very slow, owing to the darkness and the uneven nature of the ground, but they toiled on till six o'clock, when, to their chagrin, they reached the source of the rivulet without being successful. Day was then breaking, and they resolved to give up the search, and accordingly commenced their homeward journey.

After walking about three miles, still keeping near the stream, they saw some people moving about; and on going in their direction, a very nicely constructed bothy was discovered, with the fermenting vessels and mash tub inside and a fire burning. The spirits, the still, and the worm had, however, been removed during the night, and though an elaborate search was made, no trace of them could be found. The only consolation the officers had for their arduous night's toil was the demolition of the bothy and the wooden vessels. During this work of destruction, the smugglers crowded round them, as they knew they were safe, not having been found inside, and taunted the officers with their want of success, and told them that they had arrived too late. The mark of the smoky still was seen on the back of one who had evidently carried it to its hiding-place; but of course no evidence could be produced against him, though it was well known that he was the chief of the gang. The reason why the discovery was not made on the upward search was owing to the fact that the bothy was not built in the bed of the burn, but in a hollow that ran parallel to it, at a distance of nearly three hundred yards, water having been conveyed into the hollow from a higher point of the stream by means of a drain which had been cut by the smugglers. Three nights after this expedition, the officers returned to see if things were quiet, and observing a light in the chief smuggler's house, approached the window, and on looking in saw him coolly engaged making new tubs to replace those so recently destroyed.

About a month later, word was received that the same gang was again at work, but in a different place. A strong party was organised on this occasion, and a thorough search commenced during the night. As the precise spot was not accurately known, daylight again began to break before they met with any success; then the rumbling of a cart was heard, which on a close inspection was seen to be loaded with peat. As soon as the driver saw them, he took off his coat and commenced to wave it round his head, at the same time yelling at the top of his voice. The officers, aware that he was giving the alarm to some one, soon saw several men steal out of an old disused farm-steading, and rush at full speed towards the hills, over which they disappeared. Although chase was at once given, it was soon seen to be in vain, as the fugitives had received too long a start; and the officers turned their attention to the old building, in which they found the distillery in full working order, with the still, worm, and other utensils. The spirits

were poured out, the casks and tubs burned, and the copper articles carried off as prizes.

This seizure put an end to the operations of the gang for a considerable time, as they could not afford to buy new plant, the smuggler being generally poor in spite of his illegal dealings. This state of poverty is a little surprising, when one considers that the duty on spirits is about five times the cost of the manufactured article; but he makes a great many bad debts when selling his liquor, as his customers are quite aware that he dare not enforce payment.

It will thus be seen that smuggling is not a money-making trade; and if the smuggler were to display as much ingenuity in honest labour as he does in evading the law, he would have a great chance of becoming a prosperous and respected citizen, instead of being a worthless and dissolute character, and living and working in continual fear of punishment for his misdeeds.

#### PUTTING ONE'S FOOT IN IT.

'I NEVER open my mouth but I put my foot in it,' was the curious complaint of some unlucky wight, who might have received consolation had he reflected on the number of offenders that daily keep him company. The Guardsman's remark to the English nobleman who was in the habit of affably conversing with soldiers, 'I like you, my lord; there's nothing of the gentleman about you,' offers an example of the kind.—'How many deaths?' asked a hospital physician. 'Nine.' 'Why, I ordered medicine for ten.' 'Yes; but one would not take it,' was the startling reply.—'Hillo! where are you going at this time of night?' said a gentleman to his servant. 'You are after no good, I'll warrant.' 'Please, sir, mistress sent me for you, sir,' was the response.—A gentleman said to the waiter of his club: 'Michael, if I should die, would you attend my funeral?' 'Willingly, sir,' was the hasty answer. 'Well, Michael, that isn't very complimentary.' 'No, sir; I didn't mean that, sir: I wouldn't be seen there, sir,' was the waiter's consolatory reply.

A child may often be expected to put his or her heedless little foot in it, as the phrase goes. For instance, a youngster one day begged an invitation to dinner at the house of a little friend with whom he had been playing. At the table, his hostess anxiously inquired: 'Charley, can you cut your own meat?' 'Humph!' said the youngster, who was sawing away; 'can't I? I've cut up quite as tough meat as this at home.' People who are destitute of tact might take warning from such juvenile malaprops, but such does not often appear to be the case, judging by the numerous examples to the contrary.

A millionaire railway-king has a brother who is hard of hearing, while he himself is remarkable as having a very prominent nose. Once this railway-king dined at a friend's house where he sat between two young ladies, who talked to him very loudly, rather to his annoyance, but he said nothing. Finally, one of them shouted a commonplace remark, and then said in an ordinary tone to the other: 'Did you ever see such a nose in all your life?' 'Pardon me, ladies,' said the millionaire; 'it is my brother who is deaf!' We can imagine the horror of the lady who indulged in such

personal remarks, yet she was no more awkwardly placed than the hero of the following. When dining at a certain castle a Mr T—, after the ladies retired, remarked to a gentleman present that the lady who had sat on his right was the ugliest woman he had ever seen. 'I am sorry to hear,' said the gentleman, 'that you think my wife so ill-looking.' 'O no, sir; I meant the lady who sat on my left; I made a mistake.' 'Well, sir, she is my sister.'

Alluding to newspapers, it may be remarked that advertisers and unpractised writers therein, through ambiguity of words and phrases often commit absurdities that may be touched on as further illustrating our subject. A country paper once related how 'during the celebration a child was run over wearing a short red dress, which never spoke afterwards.'—In the description of the doings of a mad dog, it is said that 'he bit a horse on the leg which has since died.'—An account of a funeral says: 'The remains were committed to that bourne from which no traveller returns attended by his friends.'

It is not surprising that foreigners sometimes fail to catch all the shades of meaning belonging to our words. A Frenchman translated Shakespeare's line, 'Out, brief candle,' by, 'Get out, you short candle.' And the expression, 'With my sword I will carve my way to fortune,' was rendered, 'With my sword I will make my fortune cutting meat.'

Advertisers often give us amusing specimens of composition, of which this is an example: 'Lost by a poor lad tied up in a brown paper with a white string a German flute with an overcoat on and several other articles of wearing apparel.'—A miller attempted to testify to the merits of a powder for destroying vermin by saying, 'A fortnight ago I was full of rats, and now I don't think I have one.'

Examples more of the 'bull' genus also come under the title of this paper as cases in point. For instance, a newspaper was running a serial story called 'The Truth.' One week, so much space being devoted to other matters, the editor was unable to continue the story, so made the following announcement, containing perhaps more truth than any other item in the paper: "'The Truth' was crowded out of this issue on account of the press of more important matter.'

A bashful gentleman who visited a school kept by a young lady was asked by the teacher to say a few words to the pupils. This was his speech: 'Scholars, I hope you will always love your school and your teacher as much as I do.' A tableau of giggling pupils and a blushing teacher attested the effectiveness of his words.

The lecturer put his foot in it as thoroughly when he prefaced his discourse upon the rhinoceros with, 'I must beg you to give me your undivided attention; indeed, it is absolutely impossible that you could form a true idea of the hideous animal of which we are about to speak, unless you keep your eyes fixed on me.'—A certain preacher discoursing upon Bunyan and his works, caused a titter among his hearers by exclaiming, 'In these days, my brethren, we want more Bunyans.'—Another clergyman pleading earnestly with his parishioners for the construction of a cemetery for their parish, asked them to consider the 'deplorable condition of thirty

thousand Christian Englishmen living without Christian burial.'—Still more curious was the clerical slip with which we conclude. A gentleman said to the minister, 'When do you expect to see Deacon S— again?' 'Never,' said the reverend gentleman solemnly; 'the deacon is in heaven.'

#### GARNERED SUNSHINE.

THESE early autumn days have a peculiar charm all their own. Almost all the birds have ceased to sing; the busy hum of summer's multitudinous life has languished, and finally died away; the Earth is brooding over her perfected harvests, murmuring the while a dreamy lullaby which cannot be attuned to our measured words. As I walk to-day between dusty hedgerows along a white glare of sunlit highway leading to the harvest-fields, I can hear the sound of the reaping-machine on every side. It is a moaning sound, and seems to presage the autumn winds. But there is no wind, no cooling breeze to-day; the air is sultry, and so very still that the spinning vibrations caused by the wings of unfortunate flies, entangled in the glistening festoons of the spiders' webs, is distinctly audible. An ominous dark-blue cloud with a lurid electric light in its centre is coming up from the north. We shall have thunder ere long, although the basking sunshine still slants upon the mellow fields of golden grain, flecked with scarlet poppies. Tremulous movements in the hedges betray the presence of the silent birds; but a restless bullfinch flits before me, hurriedly pausing to whistle his abruptly terminating song; and a landrail sends his monotonous 'Crake, crake!' over a distant clover-field. I wonder if the landrail is a ventriloquist? Certainly, he is oftener heard than seen.

I follow the road past an old farmhouse, and immediately strike into a wheat-field in which the reapers are busy. A row of standing stooks redolent with the narcotic scent of withering poppies fringes the half uncut grain, and under one of these I rest awhile. How unswervingly, how regularly does the reaping-machine cut down the proud ranks of grain; how swiftly do the stooping reapers follow behind, binding the swaths into sheaves, and arranging them with picturesque precision at intervals along the crackling stubble. One could fancy that the sunshine of the summer had not fled after all, but had taken tangible form in this field of golden wheat. It is more than harvested grain, for it is garnered sunshine: summer is imprisoned in the sunny wheat. The sparrows which I have missed from the woodlands are here in chirping flocks; cheeriest of gleaners, how they revel among the stubble. I, too, will pluck a gleaner's handful of the embodied sunshine, to brighten my wall at home when the firelight flickers, and the snow taps at the windows with soft, treacherous fingers.

On a day like this, one envies the farmer and his men their close proximity to Nature. True, they wait upon her to further their own ends, and they must be ever at her beck and call; but think of the band of aerial forces she sends to aid the farmer in his toil! The sun, the wind, the rain,



the moon, the dew—these are the willing spirits he tethers to his ploughshare. He is at once their slave and their master. He must do their bidding if he would guide those sovereign forces to help him to win the harvest of the earth. Do they tarry in their coming? Then must the farmer be patient, and not in haste. He must work late or early; he must hurry or he must pause as his omnipotent servants decree. They will only serve him if he walks in the inflexible grooves of their natural laws; then only will the farmer prosper.

In the next field the thrashing-machine is at work, and women are engaged in filling their mattresses with the fresh light chaff. The hedge which separates the two fields is brilliant with the polished scarlet fruit of the dog-rose, and with many-coloured bramble sprays laden with berries in every stage of ripening, from the first faint blush of red to the luscious purple bloom of complete fruition. The thistle-down is floating like fairy shuttlecocks on the still air; and with every darting movement of the birds in the hedges, the ripe thistle-heads are shaken free of their buoyant winged seeds. The umbelliferous plants have lost their crowns of white florets and are now seeding. They are an ambitious race, and are not content with their five feet of summer growth, but must needs hurry after the departing summer with awkward lengths of useless stalk and sickly flower-umbels which will never reach perfection. These unsightly late sprouts are the hasty after-thoughts and parentheses of an over-prolific parent stem, and are destined to be overtaken and killed by the early frosts. The foliage of the lowly herb-Robert brightens the dusty grass beneath the hedges, sending a crimson wandering fire along the verdant line that fringes the sun-baked highway; and the camomile flower with its feathery foliage has supplanted the ox-eyed daisy.

I have almost trodden upon a quaint little ball of withered grass blades deftly and compactly plaited together and fastened to some ears of cut wheat. This I am told by a reaper is the tiny nest of a field-mouse. As far as I can see, there is no apparent ingress or egress; it is merely a round soft ball. A quaint and wonderful piece of architecture it seems to my astonished eyes, especially when I learn that these tiny homes sometimes contain seven young mice. I also find and carry off as a treasure a deserted linnet's nest. It was placed in the bushy hollow of a hawthorn hedge; and so beautifully dainty is it in structure and in colour, that I may be pardoned the passing thought that birds may possibly possess more or less of an artistic feeling for colour and form.

But now the portentous calm of the afternoon is broken by a distant muttering of thunder. The cloud was nearer, or has travelled quicker than I reckoned upon; the birds leave the stubble and fly low, hastening to their leafy coverts; and I make my way to the shelter of the ancient doorway of the farmhouse and there stand watching the gathering storm. The sun has disappeared behind the rising sullen blue clouds, and swift, with a heavy pattering fall, the big raindrops strike the hissing dust. There is a flash of zigzag lightning, followed by a peal of thunder that cracks overhead as if the sky was rending. Faster

falls the rain in a deluge of plashing water. How quick the dust licks up the welcome torrent! Again and yet again the lightning flashes and the thunder growls; but the cloud is very local, and gradually it moves across the sky, carrying with it a last peal of thunder, which dies in the distance just as the azure sky escapes once more from the ragged edge of the retreating cloud. Once more the sun shines forth through still falling rain, and lo! a gorgeous rainbow flings its arching span against the dark cloud, and shines with sevenfold radiance in the face of the golden sun. Upward rises a lark from a gleaming wet clover-field, singing as he climbs into the sunny air. See how white his sun-flecked breast looks against the thunder-cloud! Now he has reached the centre of the rainbow arch, and there he hangs, as if suspended by an invisible thread, singing in an ecstasy of joy.

I issue from my shelter and turn homeward; but the hedges are indistinct, and the road almost lost within a fragrant mist of incense sent up by the grateful earth. Gradually the warm vapour is absorbed by the strong sun; the delicious odour of earth fills the air, and mingles with the clammy sweetness of a hidden honeysuckle. I walk upon enchanted ground, picking my steps among pools of water which look like broken fragments of the rainbow overhead, and fallen sapphires from the blue. My path is radiant with jewels; for the raindrops that twinkle on hedgerow and grass have become emeralds and rubies and flashing diamonds by the magic power of the sun.

#### THE LAME BOY.

BEHIND the ridge of Primrose Hill,  
On summer evenings cool and bright,  
Gay crowds of careless urchins fill  
The air with sounds of laughter light.

There once I strolled in thoughtful mood,  
Delighted busy life to scan,  
For seldom sweet is solitude  
To one that loves his fellow-man.

A cricket-match! From canvas tent,  
That spread bright banners to the day,  
With bat in hand and body bent,  
A tiny cripple came to play.

'Well hit, well hit! Bob wins the game!'  
Soon rose in many a lusty shout,  
While flushed and proud, with eager aim  
He drove the lazy balls about.

The fielders must have lost their strength;  
The bowler bowls with errant eye;  
It dawns on little Bob at length  
The melancholy reason why.

A moment's pause—and then, all gone  
The glory of the ringing cheers;  
He drew his little jacket on,  
And burst into a storm of tears.

G. W. F.

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